

My Own Meals, Inc.

Information about Kosher Products

A. There are five major classes of kosher labels:

- Kosher or *Glatt* Kosher
- Kosher-Pareve (sometimes written Kosher-Parve)
- Kosher-Dairy
- Kosher-Dairy Equipment
- Kosher for Passover

1. **Kosher** means "clean", "proper or fit". On a label, it indicates that the item contains some kosher meat (beef, lamb, etc.) ingredients. If the label says "*Glatt* Kosher" this means that all the lungs and certain organs of every animal were inspected and found to be virtually free of adhesions, which are indications of previous disease. The *glatt* kosher label indicates a healthy animal. If there are too many adhesions, then the meat is pulled off the line and packed and sold as non-kosher or in special cases as non-glatt kosher.

The Orthodox, most Traditionalists, and some others, will only eat *glatt* meat. These groups account for most of the kosher consumers.

Myth: Some people think a kosher label means no hormones or antibiotics were used on the animals. This is not true.

2. **Kosher Dairy** means that some milk product or by-product is included in the item. For example, non-dairy creamer is labeled with a kosher symbol followed by a "D" since an ingredient such as sodium caseinate may be in the product. While there are some pareve (dairy-free) candies, all candy is assumed to be dairy unless otherwise marked as pareve. Milk chocolate is always dairy. Most margarine is dairy.

3. **Kosher-Dairy Equipment** means that while there are no meat or milk ingredients in the product, it was produced on a piece of equipment that previously ran dairy and the machinery was not "kashered" or cleaned and rested 24 hours in-between. (This is similar to many products labeled today as "*May contain peanuts*" even though peanuts are not listed in the ingredient panel. Consumers with allergies want to know if the product was produced in a plant that processes peanuts or if it was produced on equipment which previously produced peanuts. This is true of kosher consumers.)

4. **Kosher-Pareve** means that there are no milk or meat ingredients used. Pareve means "neutral". It includes items such as certain fish, eggs, grains, sugar, most sodas, etc. Vegetarians who will not eat fish or eggs need to watch the ingredients panels for these two ingredients as the kosher market considers eggs and fish as "neutral".

5. **Kosher for Passover** means that the product meets even more detailed rules. Passover products can be consumed during the 8 days of the Passover religious holiday, when regularly labeled kosher products are not considered adequate. Passover products do not contain "*chometz*" ingredients which are wheat, barley, rye, oats, spelt or any flours, cereals, oils, alcohols or other by-products of these ingredients. Leavening agents are also forbidden making breads not allowed for this period of time.

Most Jews also prohibit the consumption of "*kitniyos*" ingredients which include rice, kasha, beans, peas, lentils, corn, corn oil, corn starch, peanuts, soy flour and all by-products.

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B. Why the distinction?

Certain rules in the Torah (first five books of the Jewish bible) have been interpreted to mean that kosher consumers are not supposed to eat milk and meat together. In addition, there are different sects which follow different customs as to how much time must pass between eating a dairy and a meat product. Generally, kosher consumers can eat milk products before meat meals, since dairy is digested more quickly than meat. The wait period is anywhere from minutes to 1 hour. On the other hand, the wait is more restrictive and longer (many hours) if they consume meat first and then want to consume dairy.

C. The ration components:

Every item in the bag must be kosher certified individually and the supplier must keep current kosher letters on file as evidence that it is kosher certified. We received requests from soldiers over the years for copies of the kosher letters on various components, like the peanuts or the bagel chips, etc., which are from various kosher organizations.

D. Distinction between “*Kosher*” and “*Kosher Certified*”

When someone who is considered reliable by the consumer market “puts his name on it”, the product is “certified” as meeting the kosher rules. Therefore, “kosher certified” means that a religiously-observant individual trained in religious law and production methods, has determined that the food was processed meeting the expected religious standards. If products are produced at the same time without a kosher symbol being printed on the package, it may still be “kosher”, but without the certification, there is no way to communicate its kosher status to consumers.

Certain products, such as *My Own Meal*® rations, require a rabbi on-site for all aspects of production. This means on-site from the time the doors are opened in the morning, to the plant cleaning, to the plant *kashering* (boiling or steaming all equipment between kosher and non-kosher production and between types of kosher production), to production, to the packaging of all finished products and closing the plant overnight.

Other products only require periodic on-site supervision during the day. These include producers making the same products day after day using the exact same production methods and ingredients. Examples of such items include the milling of flour, or the manufacture of pastas, cereals and granola bars, or the freezing of vegetables. When these types of products are always run as kosher, the plant is always kosher. In this case, the rabbi reviews and approves all ingredients and suppliers used, establishes production standards with the plant, and then only monitors the production through frequent visits, both announced and surprise. If the plant runs both kosher and non-kosher products, or runs any combination of dairy, pareve or meat items, then more rabbinical work and supervision is required.

E. Here's where reputation and business intertwine.

1. Kosher production and certification is a BUSINESS based upon religious principles. You can't take this lightly. It is no different from the USDA getting paid to supervise the production of meat producers, or your military plants. At some manufacturers, the USDA is there every minute. In other plants, they come and go. Just as the USDA certifies that USDA standards are met, as interpreted by the local inspector, so do the rabbis certify production meets kosher laws as interpreted by the certifying organization and local rabbi.

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2. There are government and non-government agencies monitoring kosher labeling. "Kashruth Magazine" is a well-known "bulletin board" publishing known infractions of kosher labeling standards.

3. There are companies and individuals sued for falsely labeling, selling and distributing something as kosher certified when it was not certified. Kosher agencies successfully sue companies who falsely use their agencies' kosher symbol on packaging. The major religious organizations have lawyers on staff to prosecute companies and individuals for violating these rules. There are major recalls for improperly labeled products. There are even laws which prohibit the use of the word "kosher" on a product which has not been properly certified as such. The lawsuits against the companies are virtually always won. Even the use of "kosher-style" is restricted.

4. The market monitors these activities and does not go lightly when an infraction is found. This is a place where you are almost always considered "guilty" until proven innocent.

5. A US District court in New Jersey ruled that rabbis who speak out publicly on religious matters cannot be sued in civil court. Many consider this ruling to support the rights and responsibilities of rabbis to publicly disclose supervisions or facilities that do not meet their standards.

6. As in business, there are quality products and there are "crappy" copies. The trademark (brand name) tells the consumer the quality to expect, just like the rabbi's symbol (brand) does. The brand reputation is valuable and guarded in both situations.

So, it is the reputation and notoriety of the rabbinical organization that the kosher consumer relies upon. A rabbi's reputation comes from his family history, his own accomplishments and his own actions. Sometimes a rabbinical organization's certification is rejected only because the chief rabbi of the organization does something in his personal life which is not approved of by the community. It may have nothing at all to do with his production knowledge. But rabbis are expected to be better than the average guy. Reputation is as good as he keeps it and is not a right of either birth, education or experience.

7. There are two types of kosher certifications. One is when companies pay to have their products certified so that they can differentiate their products from the competitors' or meet their competitors' actions. These products are for the mass market, not for kosher consumers. It is a decision of marketing and promotion, not of product positioning. A lot of products carry a kosher symbol because non-Jews perceive that the product must be of a higher quality. They do not seek kosher certification for religious purposes. In fact, virtually none of the product's sales may be to kosher consumers. So a trusted and reputable rabbi may not be needed for this product's success in the market, since sales are not directed to kosher consumers. In this case, it could be a waste of money to meet strict kosher rules or to hire a well-regarded rabbinical organization.

The other type of kosher certification is when the product's success depends upon the market's acceptance of the reputation of the certifying rabbinical organization in addition to the brand name and the product quality. These products are primarily destined for the kosher consumer. They tend to cost more than some competing products due to the cost of the reputable organization's fees and labor in the plant, and due to the costs of additional

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production work. Conversely, it would be a waste of money to have a lower cost product with a less reputable certifying organization if the target market doesn't accept the rabbinical.

Each of the two types of rabbinical certification meets its specific product and marketing objectives. One meets consumer expectations only, and the other meets religious requirements in addition to consumer expectations. Therefore, just because a product is labeled as kosher, does not mean it will be acceptable to religiously observant kosher consumers.

8. You alone cannot tell whether a rabbi's certification is acceptable. Only the consumer market can decide that, based upon the reputation of the rabbinical certifying organizations.

POINT OF CONTACT for additional information or questions:

If you have any questions or issues, please contact me directly. Your questions do not have to directly relate to our rations or other shelf stable, microwaveable meals. Consider us a resource to help you with practical issues or when you have international guests to accommodate.

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